

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

John Stuart Mill

Denver, Colorado, June 5, 1917

His Excellency, Woodrow Wilson
President of the United States
Washington, DC

My Dear Mr. Wilson:

Complying with your edict, I registered today. Your mandate was autocratic and contrary to the Constitution. Nevertheless, acquiescence caused injustice against no one but myself. Consequently, I submitted. But, I must now tell you that I refuse to submit to conscription.

Regardless of nationality, all men are my brothers. God is "our Father who art in heaven." The commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is unconditional and inexorable.

If the parent orders the child to do wrong, the child should disobey. If the State commands the subject to violate God's law, the subject should ignore the State. Man comes before the State, and God is supreme over both.

Both by precept and example, the lowly Nazarene taught us the doctrine of non-resistance, and so convinced was He of the soundness of that doctrine that He sealed His belief with death on the cross. The great mass of the people still adhere to Christ's teachings against war, regardless of the fact that cardinals, priests and ministers have repudiated the Christian ideal and bowed to the god of expediency.

There are many ways to avoid war. Now that you are in it, there are many ways to get out of it without sacrificing, or threatening to sacrifice, a single life. Solution of the problem, without breaking the commandments of God, is merely a question of desire and determination.

Aside from right or wrong, why concern ourselves about German injustice while unmindful of the disorder of our own house? In America, millions of impoverished citizens vainly send forth their mute appeal for justice. Their supplications are answered with greater tyranny, renewed iniquities, and a further disregard of their rights and their liberties. Show me any German cruelty that can outdo in horror the massacre of the women and children in the tent colony at Ludlow!¹ And, the underlying cause of the Ludlow tragedy manifests itself daily throughout the length and breadth of this land of liberty, although it is only when given spontaneous expression that we even notice the misery, sorrow, and seething despair that is slowly eating out the heart of our boasted civilization in America. Why not correct the wrongs at home? "Hypocrite, cast first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother's eye."

I am not an alien sympathizer. I was born in Denver of Canadian-American parents, and I love America. This letter is not written in a contumelious spirit. But, when human law conflicts with Divine law, my duty is clear.

¹ Transcriber's note – The Ludlow Massacre was an attack by the Colorado National Guard and Colorado Fuel & Iron Company camp guards on a tent colony of 1,200 striking coal miners and their families at Ludlow, Colorado, which resulted in the violent deaths of between 19 and 25 people, most of whom were women and children.

Conscience, my infallible guide, impels me to tell you that prison, death, or both are infinitely preferable to joining any branch of the army and contributing, either directly or indirectly, to the death of my fellow workingmen.

I voted for you and worked for your election in 1916, and I still have faith in you. Hopeful that you may see the right and have the courage to follow it, I am:

Sincerely yours,

BEN J. SALMON

Transcribed and edited by www.nonresistance.org.

Minor changes have been made to improve readability.

This transcription is under no copyright protection. It is our gift to you.

You may freely copy, print, and transmit it, but please do not change or sell it.

And please bring any mistakes to our attention.